CONNECTICUT

BRIEFLY

Probation for faking IDs

A University of New Haven student accused of running an elaborate fake identification manufacturing business in his dorm room has been given special probation.

David Jones, 19, was granted accelerated rehabilitation on Tuesday, a probation program for first-time offenders. If Jones successfully completes it, his arrest record will be wiped clean.

Jones was charged earlier this month with five counts of second-degree forgery after police recovered five completed and partially completed licenses in his room. Police said the licenses were an "excellent replication of an actual license."

Jones charged $45 for the licenses, which he made by using a personal computer, laminating machine, camera, and a blue screen taped to the wall of his dorm. The licenses padded the ages of students who were too young to drink.

Assistant State's Attorney Mark Hurley said police have recovered many of the licenses, but more may be circulating. Jones said through his lawyer he would help police retrieve them all.

'Cure' rituals deadly

HARTFORD — Residents using mercury in folk rituals could be putting themselves and others in serious danger, state health officials warn.

The Hispanic Health Council has found that participants in a folk tradition called "Espiritismo" often use mercury to bring good luck or cure illnesses. Sometimes the liquid mercury is sprinkled around the house or placed in a candle, which causes the mercury to evaporate.

Mercury can cause permanent damage to the brain and nervous system if it is inhaled, said Susan S. Addiss, commissioner of the Department of Public Health and Addiction Services.

Only a few drops can contaminate an entire room, a statement from her office said, adding that once mercury gets into clothes or furniture, it is very hard to remove, and vacuuming increase the amount of mercury in the air.

"Children are at greater risk because they often play on floors and furniture where mercury is likely to accumulate," Addiss said.

Early symptoms of mercury poisoning can include shaking, headaches, personality changes, and loss of appetite.

Court security in doubt

DANBURY — An undercover agent with a concealed handgun who made it past a metal detector and into a courthouse two weeks after two accused felons escaped from a lockup area has renewed concerns about courthouse security here.

"We definitely have a security problem," said Capt. Gary Ingeme, chief of security for courthouses in Fairfield County.

The agent slipped into the Main Street courthouse while carrying an unloaded .25-caliber handgun, change, and a beeper. He failed to gain entrance into eight other Fairfield County courthouses because their metal detectors went off.

Investigators were checking whether procedures were followed at the Main Street court and whether the machine was functioning properly.

Two weeks earlier two accused felons escaped from custody at another lockup here, but they were recaptured the same day.

Compiled from news service reports.

Gary Tucker / Journal Inquirer

Rosalynn Carter visits with Janet Jiminez while holding her daughter, Jesseina. With Carter is Claudia Weicker.

Former first lady, Claudia Weicker put spotlight on child immunization

By LIZ DUPONT-DIEHL
Journal Inquirer Staff Writer

HARTFORD — Only a day old, Jesseina Jiminez modeled a T-shirt with reminders of an immunization schedule as she faced a gaggle of television cameras and reporters.

Jesseina's mother, Janet Jiminez, seemed more impressed at the attention, and at its cause — three prominent first ladies visiting Hartford Hospital's maternity ward to learn about a new immunization tracking system.

Rosalynn Carter, Connecticut first lady Claudia Weicker, and former Arkansas first lady Betty Bumpers, whose husband is now a senator, toured Hartford Hospital on Tuesday and were to attend a ceremony today at the Capitol.

Bumpers and Carter, who have visited some 36 states as founders of the national organization Every Child By Two, lauded Connecticut's progress in children's issues, citing the hospital's pilot tracking program and new legislation that expands Medicaid coverage to children up to 10 years old.

But with one in three children in the state still not immunized by age 2 — 70 percent in some cities, Weicker said — much work remains, the first ladies said.

Carter — fresh from a trip to North Korea with her husband, former President Jimmy Carter — said the computer tracking system could be a model for the nation.

"Our goal is to have a tracking system in every state, and then to link them all together," Carter said.

Funded with $1 million from the Aetna Foundation, the three-year venture has set up a computer program to track children's immunizations. Parents of all children born in Hartford may enroll for free in the system, said Dr. Leonard Banco, head of pediatrics at Hartford Hospital; about 80 percent do.

Banco said the effort involves some community outreach, and working with similar area programs to avoid duplication of effort.

Each mother and baby leaves the hospital with a colorful T-shirt containing a schedule of immunizations. Banco said such efforts, combined with other reminders, are important.

"A lot of parents have never seen these diseases," Carter said. "They don't know how bad they can be. I *had* the whooping cough."

But complacency doesn't mean such diseases have disappeared, Carter said. "Last year, there was more whooping cough in the United States than since 1967," Carter said. "And many of those were under 6 months old."

"You in Connecticut are way ahead of the curve in terms of having the mechanics in place to solve the problem," Bumpers said.

But barriers, such as long waits for appointments and a lack of doctors willing to take Medicaid patients, still exist, Weicker said.

"We know about the cost benefit of immunizations," Weicker said. "For every dollar spent, we save $10 in other costs later. Immunizations are part of a continuum, beginning with prenatal care."

Weicker said Connecticut's legislature and business community have made children's issues part of their agendas.

Carter said that when she and Bumpers, both wives of governors, began their campaign to increase childhood immunizations, only about 40 percent of 2-year-olds were immunized; now, she said, the figure is 67 percent.

"We now know we have every child by 5, because they have to go to school," Carter said. "But how do you find a 2-year-old?"

The Commission on Children organized the visit. Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman praised the efforts of Carter and Bumpers.

"First ladies can be a very important agent of change in this country," she said. "They understand power, and they are not hesitant to make strong statements about the family, and they are committed to system-wide reform rather than a one-shot attempt."

"Governors have so much to do," Carter said, "and states have so little money. Issues like these need a high-profile person — also, someone to do the leg work."

The first ladies were to meet an 18-year-old polio victim at today's ceremonies.

"It's just so important to immunize children before they're 2," Carter said, "because when an epidemic breaks out, it's the babies who suffer the most."

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